



The Progress-Index

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Virginia supports our troops

With 47 percent of the households in the 66th District having a family member serving in the military or a veteran in their family, I have taken a very personal interest in the well being of those now serving the nation and our veterans who have served. In that regard, I am pleased to report the 2006 General Assembly provided the best support to our military forces and veterans that I have seen in my 17 years as a member.

As The Progress-Index has such a large military/veteran readership, I want to take this opportunity to highlight some legislation of interest that passed that has a positive impact in our area.

In recognition of the sacrifices of the active duty military stationed in Virginia, we passed legislation authorizing in-state tuition for dependents of military stationed in the Commonwealth. This has been a 20-year effort! Delegate Terrie Suit (R-81st), the Chief Patron, forcefully led this effort as she knows well the challenges military families face for her husband is a serving Navy Seal. While I was proud to be the first member to co-patron her bill, I believe one of the most important reasons we were successful this year was the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) support for this bill. In-state tuition was high on MOAA's legislative priority list and many local MOAA members were present for key hearings. They made a difference. This legislation is of particular good news to our service members and their families stationed at Fort Lee.

Many of you know of the wonderful treatment provided by McGuire Veterans Hospital to our wounded service members. Fisher Houses have been established adjacent to many veterans' hospitals treating veterans and our wounded to provide no cost accommodations so family members can be near their loved ones. Half the cost of building the facilities is provided by the Fisher Foundation if matched by funds from other sources. The Assembly approved a \$750,000 grant to help with the matching funds required to build this needed facility adjacent to McGuire Hospital.

Many actions were also taken to help the family members of our mobilized VA National Guard and Reserves who face many challenges when a family member is serving on battlefields across the globe. The General Assembly provided \$500,000 to establish the Military Family Fund to help families of mobilized VA National Guard and Reserves in financial need. Another \$500,000 was provided to the VA National Guard Foundation for grants and loans for families facing hardships due to mobilization. To help maintain a full strength Guard force during this time of unprecedented full employment in Virginia, increased incentives were authorized to recruit and retain Guard members. Included in the package was \$1.33 million for reenlistment bonuses and \$700,000 to underwrite life insurance policies for Guard members.

I am pleased to report that I was able to help lead the support efforts for our military/veterans. Four of my budget items were approved that will have a positive impact on our military/veterans, particularly in our area. The Assembly approved a \$100,000 matching grant for the Quartermaster Foundation's support of the Quartermaster Museum. While the Museum helps us all gain a fuller appreciation for the roles and missions of the Quartermaster soldier, it also serves as an important training facility for young soldiers at Fort Lee as they learn of the innovation, service and valor of their predecessors. The funds will be used to provide a new entrance to the Quartermaster Museum adjacent to the US Army's Women's Museum that will help lay the foundation for two other Army museums moving to Fort Lee creating a four-museum complex as a real tourist destination for our area.

My amendment to provide \$14.6 million in funds for a third Veterans Care Center in the Hampton Roads area will help ensure more beds will be available to veterans in our area at the care center being built adjacent to McGuire Veterans Hospital. A great deal of credit for passage of this amendment goes to the American Legion and VFW for being long term champions for veterans care centers. I am particularly grateful to our local legionnaires and VFW members for being at the General Assembly to build support for the care centers. I want you to know that we listen and you make a difference. My other two amendments provide additional veterans claims officers and upgrade claims offices, thus enhancing the process for those who have served the nation.

The above are just some highlights of the support provided by the 2006 General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor. It is a testament to Virginia's recognition that we are at war and that we must prevail in the War on Terror. While the General Assembly did well, you can help too. Please take advantage of the many opportunities available to support our service members, veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much for us. One way you can help is to sign up for a "Support Our Troops" license plate. I introduced the legislation that authorizes this special license plate. The annual fee for these plates is \$25 in addition to the prescribed registration fee. The plates can be personalized for an additional \$10 per year. After the first 1,000 registrations, \$15 of the \$25 annual fee will be credited to the Support Our Troops Fund. The funds will be used to assist Virginia families of service members lost in the War on Terror. Once 350 people have signed up for the plate it will be available through DMV Offices. If you would like to sign up for the plates, go to www.supportthem.com/state/va for an application form and mailing instructions. Virginia Support Our Troops, Inc. must deliver 350 paid plate applications to DMV by July 31, 2006 or the plate legislation will lapse, and we will lose this opportunity to support the families left behind.

- Delegate Kirk Cox – 66th House District (Colonial Heights – Chesterfield County), House Majority Whip and Member, Board of Veterans Services